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Kirkpatrick Fights Back

She Calls 'Male Sexism' Her Real Foe

By Michael J. Berlin
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UNITED NATIONS, Dec. 19—Jeane J. Kirkpatrick today called a claim by her White House foes that she is "too temperamental to hold higher office" a "classical male sexist charge" of Victorian vintage.

The U.N. ambassador, whose role in the second Reagan administration remains in doubt, told the Women's Forum, a group that encompasses the female power elite within the New York business and political community, that "sexism is alive in the U.N., in the U.S. government, in American politics—where it is bipartisan—but it's not unconquerable."

It was a speech described by aides as the first she has devoted exclusively to the issue of sexism. Members of her audience said afterward that they detected a determination to maintain her status as a presidential adviser on foreign policy. Kirkpatrick won a spontaneous burst of applause by saying:

"I'm sure [former secretary of state] Alexander Haig thought he was going to wipe me out in the first nine months—and he didn't."

Haig, who resigned in 1982 following public personality and policy conflicts with Kirkpatrick and others over such issues as Poland, Israel and the Falklands invasion, was the only official she mentioned by name,

but Kirkpatrick also has been critical of what she said was the political sniping against her as "temperamental," which initially was reported in Newsweek Magazine and attributed to unnamed "senior White House aides."

It has been reported by a number of syndicated columnists as part of an apparent conservative campaign to keep Kirkpatrick in the administration that White House chief of staff James A. Baker III was among those lined up against her. Included also on those lists has been Secretary of State George P. Shultz. Her conservative allies, said to include Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger and Central Intelligence Agency Director William J. Casey, regard keeping her as crucial to maintaining the administration's internal balance of power, according to these reports.

In an interview with The Washington Times three weeks ago, President Reagan seemed resigned to her departure, saying he could not see a foreign policy post available "that would be worthy of her."

In response to a question today, Kirkpatrick made no comment on her future plans, saying she and President Reagan had agreed not to reveal the substance of their meeting on the subject last week. She confirmed earlier this week that she would stay at the U.N. until at least March or April, by which time a decision will have emerged from a postinauguration talk with the president.

Kirkpatrick, who had been asked earlier about the attacks in an interview with the Los Angeles Times, said then that there may be a "resentment of women in high politics in this country" and that some attacks on her had been motivated in part by that. But she refused at that time and again today to specify the attackers.

Today, however, Kirkpatrick elaborated on this theme. She conceded that part of the opposition to her stemmed from other factors, such as being an "outsider" and a Democrat in a Republican administration. "Still in all," she said, "I feel quite sure a significant portion of my experience was shaped just because I was a woman."

Referring to her status as the only woman in the Cabinet during the first years of the Reagan administration, she said there were "expressions of general male surprise and disapproval at the presence of a woman in areas where it is necessary for males to be assertive."

The reason that there are so few women in "high politics," Kirkpatrick said, is that the life style is "overwhelmingly male." These behavioral patterns, she went on, "are peculiarly unattractive to most women, and to me. A number withdraw from high politics by personal decision, not because they can't hack it but because they don't think it's worth it."

Her ultimate message seemed to be, however, that "any woman adapts" to such a situation—"if one can avoid getting angry and wasting one's energies on rage. If you can hang in and prove yourself, you can have good relations based on mutual acceptance and respect with almost all your colleagues." There was a detectable accent on "almost."

Asked whether she had noted any moderation in sexism in the younger generation, she said

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that there had been some improvement in the academic world, but "there is still lots of resistance to women in our diplomatic service."

Told of her remarks, two top Reagan women appointees had this to say about Kirkpatrick's view of the problems faced by women in high government office:

"It has been difficult for Jeanne . . ." said Faith Ryan Whittlesey, assistant to the president for public liaison. ". . . But she's been more of a success than she realizes."

Secretary of Transportation Elizabeth Dole, said: "The way I see it is we have come a long way in the last 20 years, but we have a long way to go before we reach the millenium."

Kirkpatrick opened her presentation by describing herself as the only woman who has ever been at the upper level of American foreign policy decision making, "a particularly male bastion." Yet, she noted, "this is where decisions are made that literally shake the world."

The same sense of maleness was true at the U.N., Kirkpatrick said. She expressed her resentment at adjectives used to describe her and "de-qualify" her—such as "schoolmarmish," or "confrontational." And she wondered why she is generally written of as "Mrs." Kirkpatrick, by comparison with "Dr." Kissinger.

She noted that one day in the Situation Room in the White House basement there were eight people around the small table: the President, Vice President, secretaries of State and Defense, director of the CIA, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, National Security adviser—"and me."

At that point, "I saw a mouse making its way from one side of the room to the other, and someone said 'a mouse? In the Situation Room?'"

"I thought later—that mouse was no stranger a presence in the Situation Room than I was."